



Started with an aim to improve human capital through quality education and development, Zee Learn runs country's largest chain of pre-schools - Kidzee, spread across 300 cities, K12 higher secondary schools, and a number of vocational institutes. **Pradeep Pillai, Business Head - Strategic Acquisition, Zee Learn, shares Kidzee franchise model and expansion plans for 2011-12 with Rosy N Sharma.**

Pradeep Pillai, Business Head - Strategic Acquisition, Zee Learn

Kidzee – Pure play franchise focus

What services are offered under the umbrella of Zee Learn?

Zee Learn's purpose is to improve human capital via quality education and development. We help individuals (children and youth) realise their unique potential through our chain of pre-schools, schools, institutes and online ventures.

Zee Learn runs a chain of pre-schools and K12 schools. Its pre-schools operate under brand name 'Kidzee' with 756 units in around 300 cities. Kidzee is a pioneer in organised and standardised pre-schooling in the country.

Zee Learn's K12 or higher secondary schools are India's only chain of schools with an integrated approach to learner centric education. With 78 schools, the K12 model is second largest school chain in unaided private category.

In vocational education, Zee Learn runs more than 31 ZICA centres and one ZIMA centre in Mumbai. Zee Institute of Creative Art (ZICA) is India's first classical and digital animation academy. Operating since 1995 with the state-of-the-art facilities and infrastructure, it offers elaborate course basket and gives practical training in 2D and 3D animation, visual effects and gaming, covering the stages of visualisation, pre-production, production and post-production.

At ZICA, a lot of emphasis is laid on the principles of art and design and fundamentals of classical animation, while extracting the same knowledge to computer based digital animation. Zee Institute of Media Arts (ZIMA) is a TV and Film training institute in Lokhandwala, Mumbai that offers diploma courses in direction, sound, editing, cinematography, animation, visual effects and Autodesk's Smoke.

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Play school market has many unorganised players. How do you position Kidzee? Why did you take to franchising for business expansion? Do you it is the ideal for this segment?

Being a pioneer and leader in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Kidzee has set unparalleled standards in the Child Development and Education (CDE) space. With years of dedicated research by Zee

CDE experts, Kidzee has developed the best-in-class child centric learning methodology called iLLUME, ensuring that every child learns and develops in the best possible way.

Since the beginning, Zee Learn has followed franchise model for Kidzee. The model lends itself to rapid expansion with standardised quality without the use of massive resources. Besides, it gives opportunity to many aspiring entrepreneurs to join our bandwagon. This not only helps us grow year after year but also allows entrepreneurs to run a successful business. With franchising we are reaching out to more children and helping them realise their unique potential.

Shed light on the franchise model that Zee Network follows for Kidzee, its strategy?

For Kidzee, we have a minimum requirement of 3000 sq ft and an investment of ₹8 to 12 lakh. We provide complete support required by the franchisee from marketing to enrolments to setting up the school. We also help them with setup guidelines, colour schemes, safety and security measures, recruitments and teacher training. Besides, we also provide the franchisee with iLLUME kit which is based on our unique methodology. With this, we ensure the standardised functioning of every Kidzee centre across the country to guarantee the brand consistency.

FACTS AND FIGURES**Product/service category:** Preschool**Operating since:** 2003**Started franchising in:** 2003**Total number of centres (across all brands):** 756**Geographical reach in India:** 300 cities**Number of company-owned company-operated centres:** 0**Number of franchisee-owned franchisee-operated centres:** 756**FRANCHISE REQUIREMENTS****Minimum space:** 3,000 sq ft**Cities or regions:** Pan India**Location (high street/ neighbourhood/ shopping centre etc):** Any location**Investment:** ₹8-12 lakh**What are the qualities or attributes you look for in your potential franchisees?**

Domain knowledge in education sector is preferred, whereas, having an already established business in the same field would be an advantage. School location, franchisee credibility and business acumen are also some key attributes that we consider. This helps smooth functioning of the business and also helps the brand deliver its true value.

How do you manage quality through franchising in service driven education sector?

We conduct regular quality checks across all Kidzee centres. Keeping the brand attributes in mind, we monitor the complete education model at our schools from curriculum to teacher training. We also conduct surprise visits at various instances.

What are the drawbacks and challenges in franchising education centres like play schools?

Since the format, profile and low investment in the sector gives an easy entry into the entrepreneurship, the seriousness of handling the business is limited as they do not come with prior experience in the sector.

What sort of support do you provide to your business partners?

Kidzee aims to provide quality education to kids to help them have a strong foundation at early age. Kidzee provides complete support to its business partners from choosing the site to marketing and execution of education facilities at the centre to ensure the centre's smooth functioning.

What is your expansion plan for Kidzee?

Kidzee currently has 756 centres in 300 cities across India. With the increasing demand for preschools in the country, we are planning to expand our reach in various locations to cater to the growing needs of education in the country. By 2012, we plan to expand our presence in 400 cities with 1,000 centres. ●